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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

PALESTINE ARAB TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
2 December 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Palestine Arab Terrorist Organizations

1. The tradition of terrorism in Arab-Israeli relations extends back into the 1920's and '30's. Before the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-49, terrorism was the principal weapon of both Arabs and Jews in harassing the British authorities in Palestine. In the early 1950's, the Arab governments organized paramilitary commando groups -- fedayeen -- which undertook raiding and sabotage missions into Israel. Israel's invasion of Sinai was in large measure a retaliation for this fedayeen activity, and the terrorist raiding ceased after the 1956 Sinai campaign.

The PLO

2. As official support of terrorist operations ceased, many Palestinian Arabs became increasingly frustrated at the relative lack of aggressiveness toward Israel on the part of Arab governments. There was persistent agitation among Palestinians throughout the Arab world for some kind of representative organization, and this culminated in 1964 in the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO received the formal sanction of the League of Arab States at an Arab summit meeting that year.

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3. The organization is a kind of Palestinian government in exile, but it has been careful to avoid such a designation because of King Husayn's well-founded suspicion that it posed a threat to his authority in west Jordan. The PLO's activities are mainly political and military; it has tried, for example, to form a "Palestine Liberation Army" around a core of Palestinian units which had been formed over the years in the Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi armies. Nasir exercises considerable influence over the PLO, though he does not completely control its leaders. The organization's "Voice of Palestine" broadcasts emanate from Cairo. The PLO is led by a dynamic super-orator, Ahmad Shuqayri, a Palestinian who at various times has been a UN representative for Syria and Saudi Arabia.

4. The PLO's long-range plans for opposing the Israelis initially omitted sponsorship of terrorist operations into Israel. PLO leaders and sponsors recognized that such operations would provoke Israeli retaliation, and very possibly lead to a war for which the Arab governments are still not ready. This policy was a source of frustration to many activist Palestinians, and it led to the emergence of the present generation of terrorist groups. The PLO has failed to persuade these groups to submit to over-all PLO direction, and, to meet their competition, has within the past few months felt compelled to undertake such activities on its own. The "Organization of Heroes of the Return" (to Palestine) is the group which appears to be the new PLO terrorist arm. Some of its members clashed with Israeli forces near the Lebanese border in mid-October.

Fatah

5. The most prominent of the terrorist groups is Fatah (a reverse acronym of the Arabic for "Palestine Liberation Movement"). Fatah is sometimes also known by the name of its commando arm, Asifa (Storm). Fatah appears to be descended from a clandestine Palestinian organization -- now inactive -- which was formed in the mid-1950's. Some of its members had connections with the Muslim

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Brotherhood, a conservative, strongly anti-Nasir politico-religious movement. Fatah also may have had links with the Arab Higher Committee of Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the ex-Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, with whom the Brotherhood collaborated in regard to Palestine affairs.

6. In its present incarnation, Fatah emerged publicly in January 1965, when it claimed responsibility for terrorist incidents in Israel. Its leaders had previously participated in the organization of the PLO, but had become disenchanted. They are also disgusted with the continuing inability of most Arab governments to act decisively toward Israel, and are wary of any official control which might curtail Fatah's operations.

7. Syria, the most bellicose of the Arab states, is the one government whose policy comes closest to Fatah's violently anti-Israeli line. Damascus supports Fatah by providing it with a base for its operations, training facilities, and a propaganda outlet. The infiltrations into Israel, however, have been undertaken from Jordanian and Lebanese territory, since those borders are more easily traversed. This has occurred without the approval of either the Jordanian or the Lebanese government. Most of Fatah's financial support comes from wealthy Palestinians living in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

8. The number of people who participate in Fatah, as well as in other terrorist organizations, is unknown and probably fluctuates. Many of the terrorists are professional thugs or smugglers, and some were active against Israel in 1955-56. The Israelis say Fatah has been responsible for 61 sabotage incidents. Israeli Foreign Minister Eban recently stated, however, that Fatah had been inactive for about six weeks.

The PLF

9. A rival Palestinian terrorist organization called the "Palestine Liberation Front" (PLF) has been credited by the Israelis with the 12 November

road mining incident which triggered the Israeli raid into Jordan the next day. Jordanian officials also suspected the PLF of having perpetrated that incident, and they had begun a search for those responsible at the time Israel attacked. Little is known about the PLF. Like Fatah, it apparently aims at provoking a general Arab-Israeli war, but it is reputed to be more skilled in its operations. PLF members are said to regard Fatah as an organization of publicity seekers.

10. Some "terrorism" in Israel is more or less spontaneous. For years, Arab smugglers and cross-border operators have occasionally clashed with Israeli security forces. Incidents of this sort have been much reduced as the Israelis' security measures have been tightened. The organized, professional terrorism of the Fatah, the PLF, and of the PLO's new arm, poses problems for Israeli authorities that have no easy solution.

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